

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

June 24, 1959

Jamesburg's Day

There was a delightful, old-fashioned family gathering in the midst of the hills in the upper Carmel Valley recently. The event was sponsored by the Monterey County Historical Society and the occasion was the unveiling of the marker at the site of the first Jamesburg Post Office established in the James family home on Dec. 22, 1888. The native rock monument and the insert of marble with the historical data, had been erected on the site by Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Church of Salinas, owners of the property, and Mr. and Mrs. Iver Henningsen who reside there.

Although the house of the James family disappeared from the scene many years ago, four locust trees, an almond tree stump and the monument mark the spot. Seventy-seven rings were counted on the stump of the almond tree by a patient and painstaking historian, although there may have been more or even less, according to our informant.

This first site of the first post office of Jamesburg is several miles beyond the present post office. In fact, the traveler does not even get a view of the present office but travels on ahead from the Tassajara and Jamesburg turnoff, through beautiful country to Anastacia Canyon. The marking is on the left before the Cahoon ranch home is reached.

At 1 o'clock Mrs. Donald Davies Jr., past president of the historical society, announced the ceremony and unveiling program. Tom Hudson, supervisor and resident of Point Lobos, was the speaker for the occasion. Residents from all parts of the county were present.

A letter from Walter Chew, a pioneer of the Jamesburg community, now a resident of Paradise, Calif., was read by Hudson. It contained this interesting data: "I am interested in the dedication of the marker at the site of the first post office at Jamesburg. I was born in that same house in 1885.

"I will gladly try to give you the history of the James family. My memory has a way of playing tricks on me, as I believe is the case with most old people and some younger ones. I wish I could be more sure of some dates.

"John James, my grandfather, came to California by way of Panama and then by boat to San Francisco about 1851. He was born in New Orleans, La. He first settled in the mines near Sonora and Jamestown. It is quite possible that Jamestown was named for him although I am not at all sure of that. My grandmother, whose maiden name was Cynthia Cox, came by covered wagon in 1852. Her first mining town was also Sonora.

"She met John James there and some years later they were married and after living in several locations in Northern California they homesteaded the place where the marker has been placed. They raised one daughter, Eleanor James, who married C. M. Chew, also an early homesteader. It was my grandmother who established the first post office in 1886 at this same location.

"I believe, about 1894 they were washed out by the flood in the Cachagua creek. The house was not damaged but the barns and corrals were completely gone, so they moved to the location now occupied by the Bill Lambert home. My father and mother, my brother and I were already living there. They built a larger, two-story house and we lived together, and my mother took over the post office there which she kept for nearly 30 years. I do not remember the date of the death of either of my grandparents, but I think my grandmother died about 1909 or 1910 and my grandfather several years earlier.

"I have also received a letter from Mabel Cahoon. Mabel knew my grandmother well, and I think my grandmother considered her a favorite child." Signed, Walter Chew.

Chew's Ridge, known to all hunters, was named for this family, pioneers of Monterey County.

Following this dedication ceremony, impressive by its complete sincerity and informality, the audience returned to the main road and a short distance ahead turned in through a gateway (guarded by a young grandson) to accept the hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. George von Soosten of Salinas, who have a country home in that quiet, charming spot, untouched by the rushing, modern way of life. Here the individual luncheons were spread and enjoyed. Several old-timers made talks and recalled incidents in the early days of the Jamesburg community.